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## France

## Biotechnology

## José Bové Running for President?

**2005**

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**Report Highlights:**

This report summarizes a recent TV program presenting José Bové as a candidate for the 2007 French Presidential elections (provided that the French justice system doesn't condemn him to jail in the next few weeks as a result of some test plot destructions in 2004). Also included is a summary of a meeting with a wide range of public and private sector representatives in the biotech arena.

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Includes PSD Changes: No  
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Unscheduled Report  
Paris [FR1]  
[FR]

On September 27, 2005, a TV program aired (France Europe Express, on channel 3) on the political aspirations of famous French anti-biotech activist José Bové. On the same day, Madelyn Spirnak, State Department Senior Advisor for Agricultural Biotechnology participated in a round table discussion in Paris with several dozen representatives from the French government, the planting seed industry, farm groups, and public research institutes. The Government of France (GOF) officials represented (1) the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Rural Affairs, (2) the Fraud Control Office of the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry, and (3) the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development. This wide range of public and private sector representatives was favorably disposed toward biotechnology and many expressed disdain for the disinformation purveyed by Mr. Bové and fellow activists. Highlights of these two events are:

#### Bové Interview:

From a background as a farmer and a union leader, José Bové aims to become a politician: on the TV program on September 27, he presented himself rather clearly as a potential candidate for the 2007 Presidential elections representing a Communist/Extreme Left/Greens coalition (such coalition has never existed to date). Bové explained he feels validated by the French “no” vote on the referendum on the European Constitution, as he campaigned for the “no.” A poll presented during the TV program indicated 44 to 49 percent of Green, Communist and Extreme Left voters in France consider Bové to be a “good candidate.” Nevertheless, a recent Court of Appeals ruling by the Court of Appeals of Toulouse against Bové, following biotech test plots destructions in 2004, resulted in a sentence of one year in prison and suspension of certain civil rights, including the right to hold public office. Final results of the trial will be released in a few weeks and the political future of Bové will depend on these results.

#### Biotech Round Table:

Biotech regulation: France is expected to be the last EU Member State to transpose the EU Directive 2001/18 into national law (late 2005-early 2006). France is usually late in transposing EU Directives in general, not only in biotechnology, but as a result of the over-cautious attitude of French policy makers. In addition, French Ministry of Agriculture representatives at the meeting with Ms. Spirnak said the GOF considers the European *de facto* moratorium to have been lifted. Seed company representatives pointed out that the previously-approved varieties are no longer “state of the art” and that a fully functioning approval process would give farmers access to more advanced innovations.

Declining European budget for research in agricultural biotechnology: A Pioneer representative said he believed that the impact of French and European anti-biotech lobbies is so strong that it has had a negative impact on the total public and private investments made in biotech research in France and Europe. A representative of a French public research institute in agriculture, CIRAD, expressed regret in the TV program on Bové that public institutes no longer have sufficient funds to do significant research in biotechnology. Also, another public research institute, INRA, is currently facing demonstrations against their biotech research on rootstock for grape vines.

Perspectives for agricultural biotechnology in developing countries: Interestingly, while Madelyn Spirnak focused a majority of her presentation on current and potential developments in agricultural biotechnology to help improve food and feed availability in the developing world, José Bové expressed the opinion that agricultural biotechnology is good only for intensive farming in the developed world, but not adapted to the developing world, as this technology is not affordable for farmers of developing countries.